

# Building Confidence and Competency in Developmental Writing Students

Great Plains Conference on Acceleration- February 25, 2022

Dr. Melissa Renfrow, Presenter



# MCC Located in Kansas City, Missouri

Largest community  
college system in  
KC – 4 campuses +  
online  
12,449 students

92 associate  
degrees, 8 transfer  
degrees, and many  
certificates

Mission: preparing  
students, serving  
communities,  
creating  
opportunities for all

# MCC Students

- 61% first generation
- 66% financial aid/40% Pell eligible
- 63% underprepared
- 62% working (10+ hrs)/61% part-time
- 38% minority
- 24 average age/20 median
- 25:1 student/faculty ratio

# Session Learning Objectives

- Identify and analyze problems with instructor feedback on developmental writing
- Consider the role of competency and confidence in the problem
- Examine a redesigned developmental composition course
- Review success and retention data for a redesigned course





# Role Play



# Reading/Writing Prompt

Dolores Curran's essay "What Good Families Are Doing Right" explains that communication is the key to successful family relationships. Consider the way your own family communicates. Which of Curran's traits of communicative families fit your family? Which do not?

Begin your paragraph with a **topic sentence** that states the POINT you will make about your family's communication. Use Curran's trait(s) to make and support your point. Here are some examples of topic sentences that do this:

- My family communicates in a way that encourages individual feelings and independent thinking.
- My first family fostered table time and conversation, but it did not encourage individual feelings, independent thinking, or equal interruptions.
- Our family needs to improve the way we listen, respond, and recognize unspoken messages.



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# Student Response

[Last Name]

4. Review

English 80

October 23, 2021

[Last Name] 1

## Family 2

My family communicates in a way that encourages individuals holding one trait that is from China's culture in our family is communication. is My family doesn't have control over a certain one. Because we use our electronics as a form of keeping in touch. Most of my siblings are all grown up and have their own schedule so we have a family group chat and always text in it. We also love watching tv together that is where we spend most of our family time. Another trait is does your family encourage each other Yes, we may look on each other sometimes because that's what siblings do, but when it comes to sports or even if something they have a passion for we are always encouraging. Especially my mom, she always comes to every game and event we have no matter what she is our biggest supporter. The place from family is The final trait I picked is does your family foster table time and conversation. Sometimes, Dinner time is so important to my mom because we used to eat together as a family every night but now everyone has their own schedule so we usually eat with only my mom. I always like going to eat as a family. My family is very close and we still talk to each other every day. My mom will ask all of us how our days are and take her time and listen. Even though she is exhausted from working all day and all she wants to do is go lay down. Communication is very important to me and it is past the lines you may think is important but in family is very close.

Commented [R44]: Overall, this paragraph is effective because it takes a strong point, offers support, or correct grammatical structures.

Commented [R45]: This paragraph shows some good use of the point of this paragraph.

Commented [R46]: well used vocabulary and strong subject-verb agreement.

Commented [R47]: This very confident "What does research over electronics?" and "family encouragement" have to do with your point about individualism? Did it make sense to you or does it not?

Commented [R48]: Please review subject-verb and all the grammar and punctuation errors at the end.

22,244



# Instructor Comments 1-3

October 20, 2021

Family 2

My family communicates in a way that encourages individuals feeling. One trait that is from Curran's list is does your family has control over the tv. No, my family doesn't have control over electronics. Because we use our electronics as a form of keeping in touch. Most of my siblings are all grown up and have their own schedule, so we have a family group chat and

**Commented [RK1]:** Overall, this paragraph is not effective because it lacks a single point, effective support, or correct grammatical structures.

**Commented [RK2]:** This topic sentence does NOT state the point of this paragraph.

**Commented [RK3]:** awkward construction and subject/verb agreement error



# Instructor Comments 4-5

always text in it. We also love watching tv together that is where we spend most of our family time. Another trait is, does your family encourage each other. Yes, we may pick on each other sometimes because that's what siblings do, but when it comes to sports or even in something they have a passion for we are always encouraging. Especially my mom, she always comes to every game and event we have no matter what she is our biggest supporter and the glue to our family. The final trait I picked is does your family foster table time and conversation.

**Commented [RK4]:** I'm very confused. What does "control over electronics" and "family encouragement" have to do with your point about of individual feelings stated in your topic sentence?

**Commented [RK5]:** Please review chapter 20 and fix all the fragment and run-on sentence errors in this response.



# Definitions from Oxford Languages

Competency =

*the ability to do something successfully or efficiently*

Confidence =

*a feeling of self-assurance arising from one's appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities*



# Are comments aimed at building competency or confidence? Both? Neither?

*C1: Overall, your paragraph is not effective because it lacks a single point, effective support, or correct grammatical structures.*

*C2: This topic sentence does NOT state the point of this paragraph.*

*C3: awkward construction and subject/verb agreement error*

*C4: I'm very confused. What does "control over electronics" and "family encouragement" have to do with your point about of individual feelings stated in your topic sentence?*

*C5: Please review chapter 20 and fix all the fragment and run-on sentence errors in this response.*



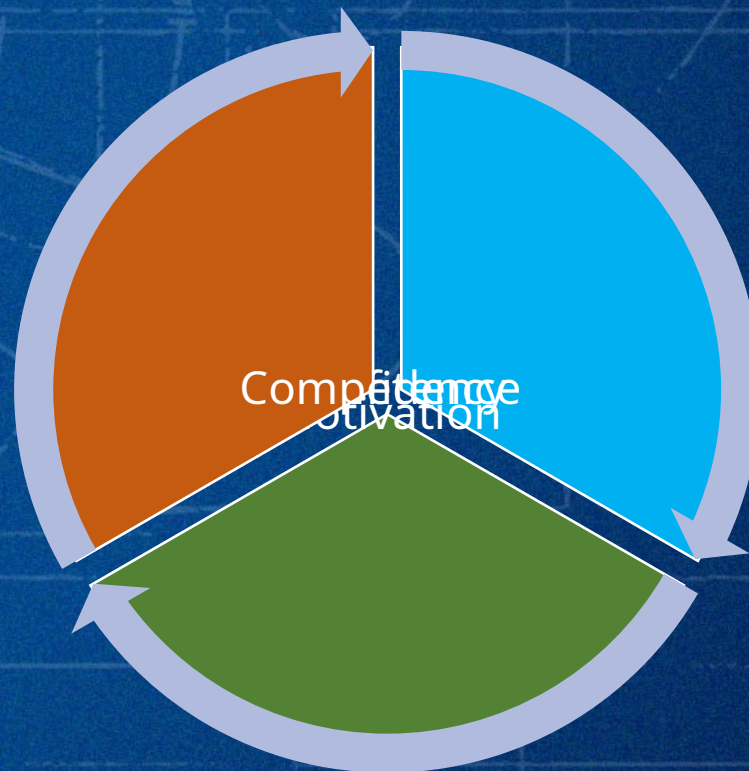


# ENGL 28 Expected Student Outcomes

1. Employ the writing process (including pre-writing, planning, drafting, and revision) to produce focused, supported, and grammatical paragraphs.
2. Compose sound paragraphs that include focused topic sentences, descriptive details, facts, and examples that develop the main idea, effective patterns of organization, and transitional devices.
3. Compose an accurate summary and paraphrase.
4. Read and explain a variety of expository texts and connect what is read to personal experience in unified and coherent paragraphs.
5. Write a unified multi-paragraph document that discusses and connects readings.
6. Demonstrate an understanding of sentence fundamentals.
7. Identify and apply the conventions of standard written English in one's own written work.



# The Chicken or the Egg?





Which feeling might be more motivating for students?



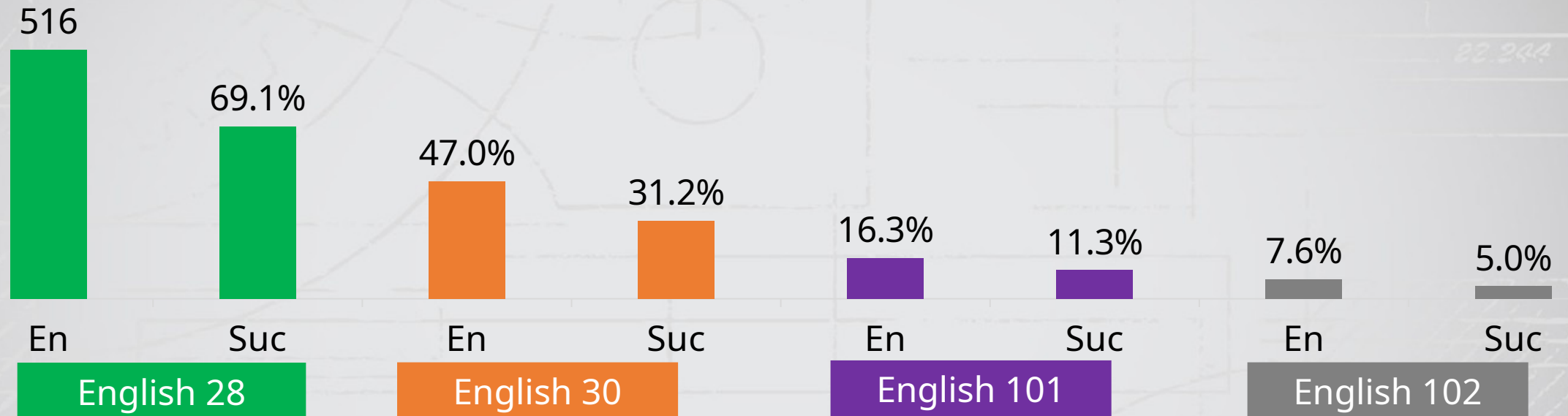
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# Traditional MCC English Sequence

Fall 2012 Cohort





# MCC Composition

- ENGL 80 Foundations of College Writing I
- ENGL 90 Foundations of College Writing II
- ENGL 90/101 Co-Requisite
- ENGL 101 Composition and Reading I
- ENGL 102 Composition and Reading II





# English 28 > 80 Re-Designed Course

## Placement

- COMPASS > Accuplacer
- multiple measures implemented: ACT, Accuplacer, HSGPA, or writing challenge

## Time

- 3-hour course > 4-hour course
- traditional instruction > more individualized instruction (lab)

## Pedagogy

- product-focus > process-focus
- new course outcome added aimed at confidence-building

## Grades

- letter grade > satisfactory/unsatisfactory
- percentages > completion points



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# ENGL 80 Expected Student Outcomes

1. Employ the writing process (including pre-writing, planning, drafting, and revision) to produce focused, supported, and grammatical paragraphs.
2. Demonstrate awareness of and responsibility for own learning and writing process, and develop strategies for improvement.
3. Compose sound paragraphs that include focused topic sentences, descriptive details, facts, and examples that develop the main idea, effective patterns of organization, and transitional devices.
4. Compose an accurate summary and paraphrase.
5. Read and explain a variety of expository texts and connect what is read to personal experience in unified and coherent paragraphs.
6. Write a unified multi-paragraph document that discusses and connects readings.
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# Strategies for Confidence-Building Instructor Comments

- Acknowledge the good
- Be specific
- Ask questions
- Make suggestions
- Offer beginning phrases (finish the sentence)
- Use pronouns strategically
  - First to acknowledge strengths
  - Second person to ask questions
  - Third person to address weaknesses



# Revised Instructor Comments 1-3

- *C1: Overall, your paragraph is not effective because it lacks a single point, effective support, or correct grammatical structures.*
- *C1: I liked how you applied several of Curran's traits to your own family! I found myself wanting to know more details about each that you shared. Could you focus your response on only two of Curran's traits but give more specific details and examples for each?*
- *C2: This topic sentence does NOT state the point of this paragraph.*
- *C2: The topic sentence focuses on the idea that family communication encourages members to express their feelings. Can you explain how Curran's other traits support the "expression of feelings"?*
- *C3: awkward construction and subject/verb agreement error*
- *C3: Some constructions in this sentence are bumpy. Could you reword the sentence to smooth out the bumps? You might try start the sentence with "Curran says that..."?*



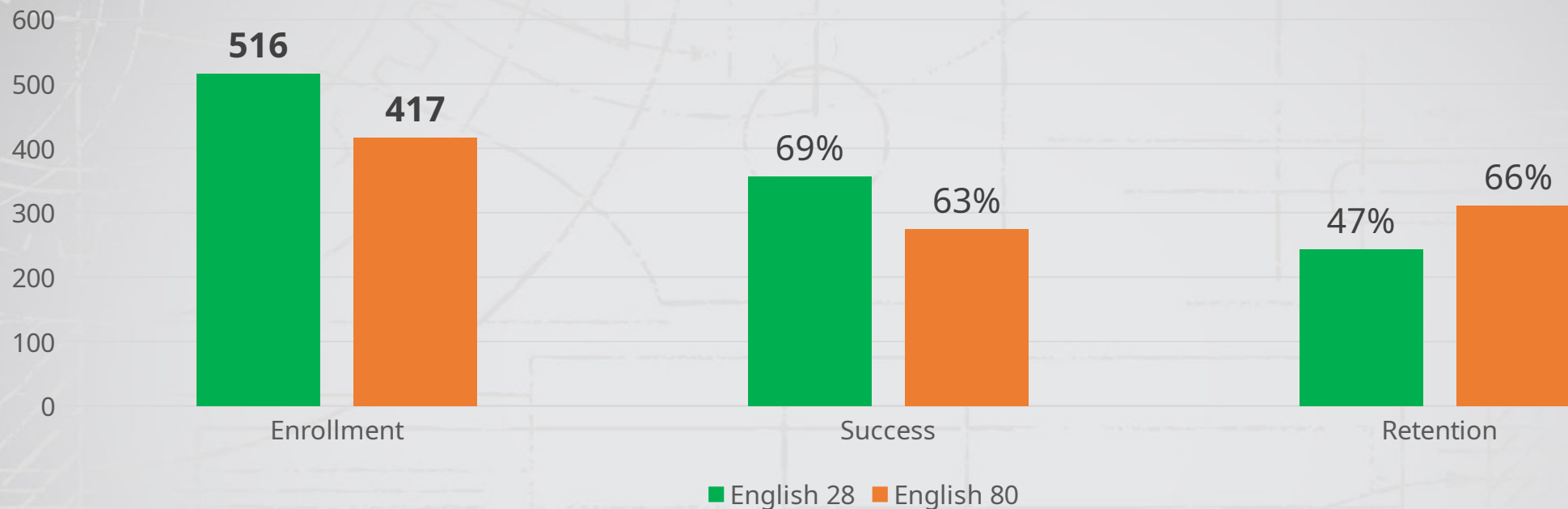
# Revised Instructor Comments 4-5

- *C4: I'm very confused. What does "control over electronics" and "family encouragement" have to do with your point about individual feelings stated in your topic sentence?*
- *C4: I really like how you connect to Curran's article by including these two traits (control over electronics and family encouragement) in your response! How does your family control electronics? Does this control or lack of control encourage communication?*
- *C5: Please review chapter 20 and fix all the fragment and run-on sentence errors in this response.*
- *C5: This is a run-on sentence. Can you separate the two sentences with a period or join them with a conjunction placed between "we have" and "no matter what"? Let's schedule a time to discuss other, similar sentence errors in your response.*



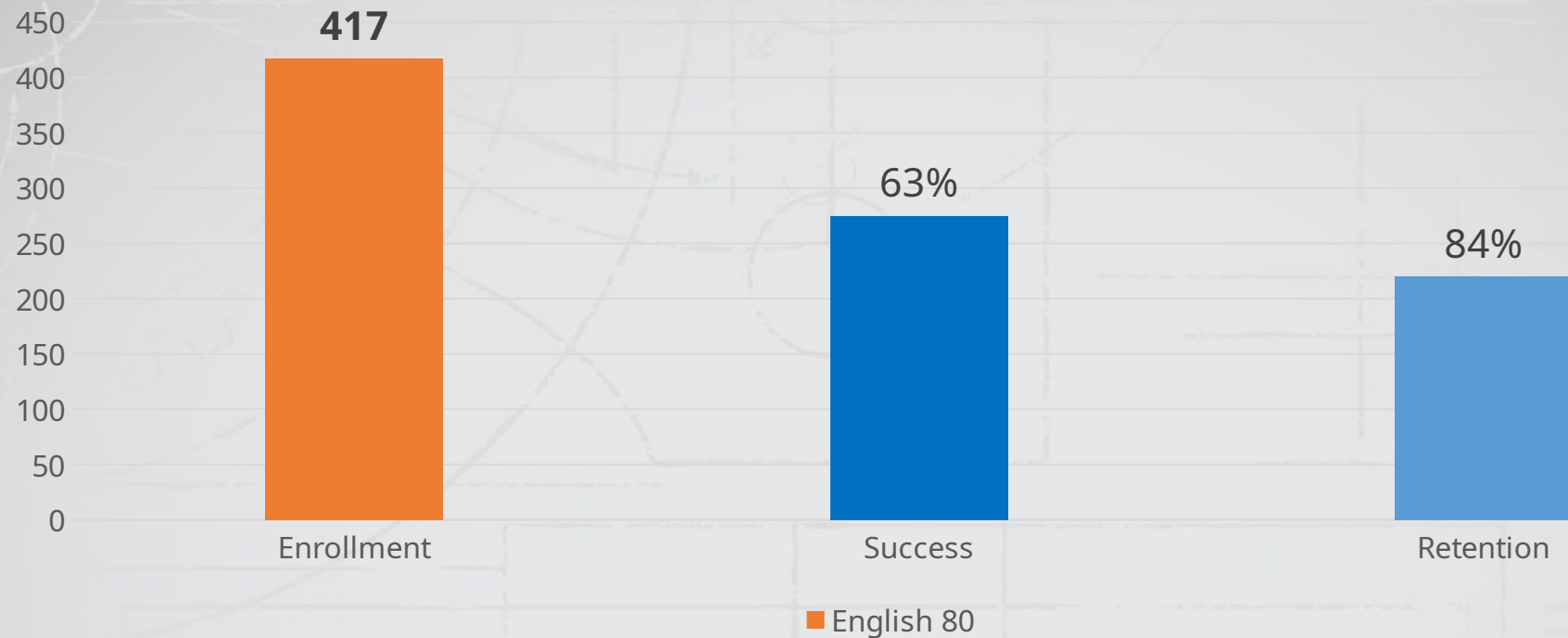
# English 28/80 Comparison

Fall 2012 Cohort Compared to Fall 2019/20/21 Cohorts





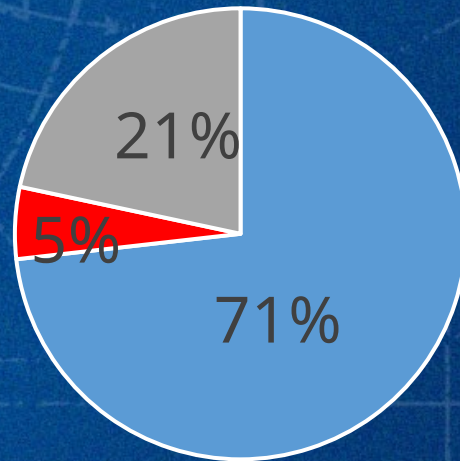
# English 80 (Revised) Retention





# English 80 Renfrow Success

Fall 21 n=21



■ Satisfactory ■ Unsatisfactory ■ Withdrawal



# End-of-Course Question for Students



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Most college courses assess student work using standard letter grades (A, B, C, D, F) or percentages (90%, 80%, 70%) for assignments. The assignments in this course, however, earned only completion points (5, 10, 20, and so on).

**How did earning completion points rather than letter grades/percentages make you feel during the course?**



*I feel that completion points are better than the letter grades. It is giving credit for trying which is very helpful other than just getting an F.*

*I think completion grades for sure motivated me to do better because I got points for trying.*

*I agree with the completion system. Working through the process has helped me to learn as I go. I want to revise my work to get better at writing. I think a letter grade may discourage me now.*

*By not worrying about a grade, I feel like I have learned the writing process. I have learned a bunch in this class and it has helped me become a more advanced writer.*

*I think completion grades motivated me to revise my work better than A, B, C grades. Revision and editing my work many times helped me to learn more about my mistakes than A, B, C grade.*



# Burning Questions

- Success/retention rates for English 80 students in 90/101/102?
- Correlation between placement measure, success, and/or retention?
- Why some students withdraw?
- Other?



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